

Chapter 3

Strengthening Learning and Quality Outcomes for Adult Learning and Teaching Through Trust and Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions in the United States are under constant scrutiny for failing to adequately develop many students' critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills during the first two years of college. This begets the question: what can faculty do to better prepare students for future careers through developing deeper learning and increased skill sets? It is imperative that higher education institutions find renewed confidence from their public constituents. Seeking answers to these challenges, the emphasis on this chapter will be on what faculty members can do to strengthen the learning and quality outcomes of instruction by developing trusting relationships with students and enhanced student motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education stakeholders are constantly reminded of the external and internal forces impacting their institutions, and they are under strict scrutiny regarding how they meet these challenges. Recently, these forces have become

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formidable, questioning the core values of higher education. According to a recent Strada-Gallup (2017a) report, only a third of higher education students believe they will graduate with the skills and knowledge to be successful in the job market (34%) and in the workplace (36%). Another Strada-Gallup (2017) report of college graduates notes that only 22% strongly agree they had a mentor who encouraged their goals and dreams, and only 27% strongly agree they had a professor who cared about them personally during college (Busteed, 2017). This is further substantiated by Arum and Roksa (2011) as they state that higher education has done little to develop many students' critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills during the first two years of college. This begets the question: what can faculty do to better prepare students for future careers through developing deeper learning and increased skill sets? This poses great challenges to higher education administrators and faculty amidst the contemporary debate about the high and ever increasing cost of education (an increase of 400% in 30 years) and the parallel concern that quality and benefits do not justify the high cost. Hence, many Americans are questioning whether higher education is worth the inflated tuition price and time investment (Pew Research Center, 2011). Several authors posit that the current structure of the educational system, geared to creating successful employees and consumers, is not adequate for the needs of today's students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bangser, 2008). It is imperative that higher education institutions find renewed confidence from its public constituents. Seeking answers to these challenges, the emphasis on this chapter will be on what faculty members can do to strengthen the learning and quality outcomes of instruction by developing trusting relationships with students and enhanced student motivation.

A great deal of research has been conducted establishing the connection between high levels of trust and employee motivation and performance (Webb, 2007). When trust thrives in organizations, greater motivation and higher performance ensue. The author investigates whether the same results can be found in higher education settings focusing on adult learners. Using the definition from Chao (2009), an adult learner is someone who *“is a self-directed person, 24 years of age and above whose engagement and readiness to learn is based on the immediate applicability to the development tasks of his/her social role incorporating his/her reservoir of experience (p. 906).* Will bringing trust and motivation into the classroom lead to deeper learning and more engaged adult learners? Does greater trust create the conditions to

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